

# WILDLIFE PROFILES



## Kokanee Salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*)

**Range:** Kokanee salmon are not native to Wyoming. They are very closely related to a type of fish called sockeye salmon. The only difference is that kokanee spend their entire life in fresh water. Sockeye spend most of their lives in the Pacific Ocean and then swim up freshwater streams to lay and fertilize their eggs. Kokanee were introduced to Wyoming in Fremont Lake, New Fork Lake and Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Today they also live in Boulder Lake, Fontenelle Reservoir, and High Savery Reservoir. You can fish for them, too, in the New Fork River and the Green River, both above and below the Fontenelle Dam.

**Size:** Kokanee can grow to 9-17 inches long and weigh an average of 1 pound. They can sometimes grow to lengths of up to 20 inches long and weigh 3-5 pounds.

**Habitat:** Kokanee salmon like cold deep lakes and reservoirs. They spawn in loose gravel and sand along lake shores or in river beds.

**Young:** Adult kokanee spawn their eggs in the fall. The fertilized eggs lay in the gravel of river beds or lake shores all winter

until spring when they hatch. When the eggs first hatch the babies are called an alevin. Alevins have a yolk sack attached to their body and get all their nutrients from the yolk sack. In a few weeks the yolk sack gets absorbed and the alevin develop into a small fish called fry. Fry swim out of the gravel and move downstream into a lake or reservoir.

**Predators:** Lake trout, brown trout and rainbow trout are all predatory fish that eat kokanee. Hawks, eagles, falcons, and osprey will eat kokanee while they are spawning.

**Food:** Kokanee mostly eat tiny shrimp like animals called plankton. Sometimes kokanee eat water insects and even small snails.

**Did you know?** Kokanee only spawn once in their life when they are mature adults of 3-4 years old. Before kokanee are mature they are a silver color with blueish backs. When they are old enough to spawn, kokanee turn bright red and their heads and tails turn green. A week or two after adults spawn, they die.

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## Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)

**Range:** Rainbow trout are native to cold-water streams and rivers that lead to the Pacific Ocean. Wyoming Game and Fish hatcheries raise and stock rainbow trout in many Wyoming waters. Rainbow trout are an example of a non-native species that Game and Fish stocks so that you can fish for them.

**Size:** In rivers, adult rainbow trout usually weigh between 1 and 5 pounds. In lakes, they can get much larger, up to 20 pounds.

**Habitat:** Rainbow trout live in streams, lakes and reservoirs. They use aquatic plants, boulders and wood as shelter to hide from predators.

**Young:** Rainbow trout are usually 3 - 4 years old when they spawn, which is what biologists call it when female fish lay eggs and male fish fertilize eggs. Wild spawning rainbow trout swim up streams in the spring time and lay their eggs in a little gravel nest built by the female trout. A single female may lay 400-3,000 eggs depending on her size. After the eggs are fertilized she will cover them back up with gravel and leave. After 20 to 80 days, the eggs hatch but the baby fish (called alevins) stay under the gravel and develop

for another 2 to 3 weeks. After that time, they swim up and begin feeding in the stream or lake.

**Predators:** Young rainbow trout often are eaten by larger fish including sculpins, smallmouth bass and larger trout. When in shallow water, kingfishers, herons, eagles, osprey, otters, and raccoons might also eat them. Humans who like to fish also catch and eat rainbow trout.

**Food:** Rainbow trout are not picky eaters, and they will eat aquatic larvae and insects like caddisflies, mayflies and stoneflies. They also eat ants, beetles, grasshoppers and crickets that fall into the water. Other prey include fish eggs and small fish up to one-third of their length, crayfish and freshwater shrimp.

**Did you know?** In 2018 the Game and Fish raised one million, nine hundred sixty-six thousand, three hundred and ninety two (1,966,392) rainbow trout to stock into lakes, reservoirs and rivers for people to catch.



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(Photo by Fredlyfish4)

## Orangethroat darter (*Etheostoma spectabile*)

**Range:** This darter can be found in streams and rivers from western Ohio to the Rocky Mountains in Wyoming. It's especially common on the eastern plains of Wyoming.

**Size:** Adult orangethroat darters are usually about two and a half inches long.

**Habitat:** This fish is mostly found in small streams with sand or gravel bottoms, but can sometimes be found along the shorelines of small lakes.

**Young:** Female orangethroat darters can lay up to 200 eggs at a time, and they can start laying eggs after they are a year old. Although all of these eggs do not survive and hatch, a good number of them do.

**Predators:** These fish can be eaten by larger fish such as trout or bass. In eastern Wyoming, northern pike were found in the Niobrara river where they shouldn't naturally be. These pike can eat a large number of smaller fish, including orangethroat darters.

**Food:** Orangethroat darters mainly eat fly larvae and other insects.

**Did you know?** Life in a prairie stream can be tough! The orangethroat darters must get creative to survive when the summer rolls around and these streams almost completely dry up. These fish are tough and can survive in very warm shallow pools with not much oxygen until the streams flood again.